

Message Text

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SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE DECLARATION BY XII ASSEMBLY
OF ZAIRIAN BISHOPS

REF: A) A-002, B) KINSHASA 413

SUMMARY: JANUARY 16 STATEMENT BY 12TH ASSEMBLY ZAIRIAN
BISHOPS NOTED "ANTI-RELIGIOUS" INTERPRETATION GIVEN
PRINCIPLE OF LAICISM, ANNOUNCED PROGRESSIVE WITHDRAWAL
OF CHURCH FROM NON-PASTORAL WORK, AND REFUSED TOO-CLOSE
COLLABORATION WITH CIVIL AUTHORITY FOR FEAR OF DIRECT
INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS. END SUMMARY.

1. BISHOPS OF ZAIRE AT END OF 12TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY
JANUARY 16 PUBLISHED DECLARATION READ IN CHURCHES OF
KINSHASA JANUARY 19 AND 26. STATEMENT CALLS FOR NEW
ROLE FOR CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ZAIRE DURING PERIOD WHEN OFFICIAL
DOCTRINES OF LAICISM AND AUTHENTICITY BEING INTERPRETED IN
"ANTI-RELIGIOUS SENSE." DECLARATION NOTES ANTI-RELIGIOUS BIAS
IN SUPPRESSIONS OF: CHRISTIAN NAMES, CHURCH YOUTH GROUPS,
CHURCH PUBLICATIONS, PUBLIC DISPLAY OF CROSSES AND CRU-
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CIFIXES, RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN THE SCHOOLS (ALTHOUGH

CONSTITUTIONALLY GUARANTEED), AND THEOLOGICAL FACULTIES AT UNIVERSITY. WHILE AGREEING WITH PRINCIPLE OF LAICISM AS CONSTITUTIONALLY DEFINED, BISHOPS CITE ARTICLE 18 OF CONSTITUTION AS GUARANTEEING FREEDOM OF WORSHIP, PUBLIC AS WELL AS PRIVATE. THEY STATED THAT IN "NEW SOCIAL-POLITICAL CONTEXT" CHURCH FEELS CONSTRAINED TO WITHDRAW PROGRESSIVELY FROM TEMPORAL WORK TO CONCENTRATE ON PASTORAL MISSION. PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THIS DECISION DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:

LCM TEACHING. DECEMBER 30, 1974 DECREE ABOLISHING CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE HAS ABSOLVED CHURCH FROM ALL EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY. CHURCH PERSONNEL WILL CONTINUE IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE POSTS ONLY IF REQUESTED, AND ONLY TO END OF CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR. CHURCH PERSONNEL PREVIOUSLY ENGAGED IN RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION WILL BE WITHDRAWN FROM THE SCHOOLS TO STAFF EXTRA-MURAL CATECHISM CLASSES. LAY TEACHERS OF RELIGION ARE FREE TO REMAIN IN THE SCHOOLS TO TEACH ANY SUBJECTS FOR WHICH THEY MAY BE QUALIFIED. CHURCH PERSONNEL QUALIFIED TO TEACH SUBJECTS OTHER THAN RELIGION MAY REMAIN ON AN INDIVIDUAL, PERSONAL BASIS, ON CONDITION THAT THEIR RELIGIOUS STATUS BE RESPECTED, AND THAT NO DOCTRINE CONTRARY TO THEIR FAITH BE IMPOSED ON THEM AS GUARANTEED TO THE BISHOPS BY THE PRESIDENT ON JANUARY 14, 1975 (REF B).

3. MEDICAL, SOCIAL, DEVELOPMENTAL WORK. CHURCH WILLING TO CONTINUE IN THIS FIELD PROVIDING STATUS RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL IS RESPECTED. BUT, LOOKING TO EVENTUAL WITHDRAWAL, RELIGIOUS STAFF WILL ACCELERATE TRAINING OF LAY REPLACEMENTS.

4. CHURCH AND POLITICS. WHILE PROFESSING LOYALTY AND SENSE OF NATIONAL PARTICIPATION, BISHOPS REJECT TOO-CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH CIVIL AUTHORITIES, NOTING THAT SUCH COLLABORATION HAD TAINTED COLONIAL CHURCH AND MIGHT LEAD TO DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS. SPECIFICALLY BISHOPS REFUSE PARTICIPATION IN STATE "ORGAN OF CONCEPTION AND DECISION" (WHICH IS OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION OF POLITICAL BUREAU), BUT DECLARE THEMSELVES READY TO CONSULT, ADVISE, AND COOPERATE IN SOCIAL ACTION. IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONCLUSION, BISHOPS NOTE THAT NEW CONTEXT CONFRONTING FAITH IS ONE CALLING ALL ZAIRIANS TO DEEPEST REFLECTION.

5. COMMENT: BISHOPS' CAUTIOUS REPROACH AND CAREFUL DISTANCING FROM REGIME MAY PRESAGE FURTHER DETERIORATION CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS. THOUGH ABSENCE OF CLERICS ON POLITICAL BUREAU OFTEN REMARKED, THERE HAD BEEN NO PREVIOUS INDICATION THAT HIERARCHY HAD BEEN ASKED TO

JOIN IT AS PRESENT STATEMENT SEEMS TO SUGGEST. EVENTUAL
WITHDRAWAL OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS WILL FURTHER WEAKEN
ALREADY INADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.
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